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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2004

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LOCAL OFFICIALS TEAM UP WITH NATIONAL LEADERSHIP
TO REDUCE GUN CRIME IN OUR COMMUNITY



Federal Gun Crime Prosecutions Hit Record Highs, While Violent Crime Rate Hits 30-Year Low

SAVANNAH, GA: Paul B. Murphy, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced that the national Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) conference is meeting this week in Kansas City, Missouri and includes a ten person delegation from the Savannah area. Attorney General John Ashcroft spoke to over 1,150 federal, state, and local prosecutors, law enforcement officials, community leaders, and other members of the PSN teams from across the nation who came together to discuss efforts to reduce and prosecute gun crime. PSN is President Bush's comprehensive initiative to combat gun crime in America by providing locally-based programs with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

"Through Project Safe Neighborhood's unprecedented partnership of state, local and federal leaders, we are turning the tide on gun crime," said Attorney General John Ashcroft. "We are taking gun-wielding criminals off our streets. The last three years represent a record of great success, but

working together, we can do even more to make our neighborhoods safe.”

“In this district, we are actively pursuing gun crimes through our local PSN initiative, Project Ceasefire, which is our gun violence reduction program. Through partnerships with local law enforcement, the district has created a unified offensive to reduce the threat, incidence, and prevalence of violence stemming from gun crimes. As a direct result of our PSN initiative, the number of gun-related prosecutions in this district has risen to a level significantly higher than the national average for the period FY 00 to FY 03,” said U.S. Attorney Paul Murphy.

Federal Gun Crime Prosecutions Have Increased Significantly Every Year Under Project Safe Neighborhoods. From FY 2000 to FY 2003, federal firearms prosecutions increased by 68%. In FY 2003, the Justice Department filed over 10,500 federal firearms cases the highest number ever recorded by the Department. The number of defendants charged with federal gun crimes rose from approximately 10,600 to over 13,000 from FY 2002 to FY 2003, a record increase of almost 23%. These figures are the highest on record in a single year since the Department began recording this information. In FY 2003, nearly all -- 93% -- of convicted defendants, who were originally charged with federal firearms offenses, were sentenced to some time in prison for convictions on firearms charges or other charges. 72% were sentenced to more than three years in prison, and over half of all defendants convicted were sentenced to more than five years in federal prison. State and local prosecutions have also increased.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Is Working In South Georgia. Mr. Murphy, working side by side with state and local law enforcement, prosecutors and other community leaders, has created a PSN strategy to fit the unique gun crime problem in the Southern District of Georgia. Criminals who use guns are prosecuted under federal, state, or local laws, depending on which jurisdiction can provide the most appropriate punishment.

The case of Opollo Johnson illustrates Project Safe Neighborhoods’ success in South Georgia. Local drug agents executed a “crack” cocaine search warrant on Johnson’s residence, finding small amounts of drugs. Because Johnson was a previously convicted drug dealer, and was reaching for a gun when police entered his bedroom, he was sentenced to 20 years in federal prison, without parole. This case and other similar cases are part of Project Ceasefire. To date under Project Ceasefire, 311 firearms offenders have been indicted and our office has convicted 220 defendants, with an average sentence in excess of seven years without parole.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Has Contributed to Decreasing the Violent Crime Rate to Its Lowest Levels in 30 Years, But Reducing Gun Crime Remains an Important Goal. The violent crime rate is now at its lowest level since 1973, when the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics started collecting criminal victimization data. The violent crime rate for the first two years of the Bush Administration (2001-2002) was nearly 21% lower than for 1999-2000. The per capita number of violent crimes involving firearms has dropped 14% in 2001-2002, from 1999-2000. There were approximately 64,000 fewer gun crimes and

approximately 12% (almost 130,000) fewer victims of gun crime in 2001-2002, than in 1999-2000.

Project Safe Neighborhoods Takes a Multifaceted Approach to Reducing Gun Crime. Gun crime reduction is President Bush's top domestic criminal justice initiative, and the Bush Administration has devoted over \$1 billion to Project Safe Neighborhoods in its first four years (FY 2001 to FY 2004). The funds have been used to hire new federal, state, and local prosecutors, provide training, hire research and community outreach support, and develop and promote effective prevention and deterrence efforts. Each of the 94 federal judicial districts engages in deterrence and prevention efforts through community outreach and media campaigns and ensures that law enforcement and prosecutors have the training they need.

The PSN conference is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice. To find out more about PSN and its local programs, visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.

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